

# COMMENTS ON CONDON

THE immediate effects of *Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*, the report by Dr. Edward U. Condon, Director of the U.S. Air Force-sponsored University of Colorado Project (Bantam Books, New York, in association with the *New York Times*, 965 pages, \$1.95 paperback) have been demonstrated in this issue's Editorial article. Since those lines were written, a copy of the book has come my way. I confess that my spare-time chores, such as managing, editing and publishing this *Review* have so far permitted me little time for a detailed study of the work.

What I have seen, however, has shown that Aimé Michel hit the bull's-eye with most of his observations which were recorded in the Editorial *While We Wait* (FSR, November/December 1968). The report is long, tedious, thick, and almost entirely negative: the anticipated psychological considerations, however, have fallen by the wayside.

Dr. Condon gets right in at the start with the assertion that "... nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge"—which fact does not surprise me, for most scientists who have evinced any sort of interest in UFOs have invariably gone in fear and trembling of the reactions of their colleagues and superiors, with the inevitable result that only a few have taken more than a clandestine look at the subject. What does surprise me is that the good doctor is then quite capable of insisting that no further study is justified, and that in spite of the fact that, even in the hand-picked sample of cases that follows, there remain some that are unexplained, among them the McMinnville, Oregon, sighting and photograph of May 1950.

This has not escaped Dr. J. Allen Hynek who, in a review published in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*

(April 1969), says that even after the hoaxes and mis-identifications of common objects have been explained, "... there remains the same strange, inexplicable residue of unknowns that has plagued the US Air Force investigation for 20 years. In fact, the percentage of 'unknowns' in the Condon report appears to be even higher than in the Air Force investigation (Project Blue Book)—which led to the Condon Investigation in the first place."

In a private communication, Aimé Michel writes that an interesting point is Dr. Condon's imperious assertion that nothing remains hidden—which is hardly in accordance with the facts. Asks M. Michel: "Why does he not mention the liability of U.S. service personnel to 10 years imprisonment and \$10,000 fine, under JANAP-146, for disclosing details of UFO reports? Why does he not quote the most striking military cases such as Migot, N. Dakota? He should have worked on the best cases, not the most publicized ones."

Nevertheless it is only fair to say that many of the limited number of investigations appear to have been very well-conducted, and have cleared out some of the dead wood. Generally, however, I am left with the impression that the Colorado Project was concerned with a phenomenon only partly related to the one which interests us.

FSR will publish a selection of views on the Report. John Keel was first off the mark with many pertinent points, so he takes "first knock" while Bryan Winder ploughs his way through the 965 pages. Also in hand for our next issue is an excellent article by Donald Hanlon, who looks at both the Condon Report and Dr. David Saunders' book *UFOs? Yes!*

CHARLES BOWEN.

## REVIEW OF THE FINAL REPORT OF DR. EDWARD U. CONDON

*John A. Keel*

I AM a prejudiced reviewer and must admit this at the outset. I have been deeply involved in the investigation and study of unidentified flying objects for the past three years and have arrived at very definite opinions and conclusions about the phenomenon. I have seen innumerable objects during my travels . . . some at very close range. Objects which I could not explain, and which displayed characteristics and executed manoeuvres radically different from known natural phenomena and conventional aircraft. In recent years, I have written and published many detailed newspaper and magazine articles on the UFO controversy. The Condon Report has singled out two of

those many articles for criticism—I'll comment further on those items later on.

From the very beginning of the project I adopted a "hands off" policy and refrained from making public comment on the effort until the final results were in. I have now read the entire report and feel that the following comments are valid and worthy of notice. They are based upon a reasonably objective study of the data offered and I have tried to suppress my own personal attitudes in making that study. I will try to examine here the successes and failures of the report as seen by a reporter with extensive scientific, in-

vestigative and journalistic experience.

### The Contents' and Objectivity of The Condon Report

#### Cheap padding

At least 50 per cent of the Condon Report (CR) consists of "padding", in the form of assorted Air Force documents and scientific papers on mirages, radar signals, meteorological phenomena, collected *at little or no cost* to the project. A large portion of this "padding" material has been published in other UFO books over the past twenty years and cannot be considered a significant contribution to the

subject. While it was to be expected that some material of this type would be included in the CR, it was also to be expected that such material would have been *updated* and that correlations with specific cases would have been drawn to demonstrate the possible validity of these various natural phenomena as potential explanations of some UFO sightings. Instead, most of this material is presented in an unrelated, almost irrelevant manner. Again, I must stress that *50 per cent of the Condon Report is based upon material which was obtained at little or no expense.*

### Participants

In Appendix X, 38 people are listed as having participated in the preparation of the report. Of these, 17 were involved with the Project in the beginning, but only six were directly involved with the CR from its inception to its conclusion. A number of the contributors were brought into the Project after all investigations had been concluded. Most of the original participants had left the Project in early 1968, following the controversy which erupted over the sacking of two members. In other words, the CR was not assembled by those who had worked hardest on the collection of the materials.

One would naturally expect that any purportedly scientific document prepared by a major University, commissioned by the U.S. Air Force and financed by government (tax-payers') money would be very dry, very objective, and very well organized. Yet, incredibly, the report largely lacks any objectivity at all and it is obvious that the various contributors were not even superficially familiar with the work and findings of their own colleagues. The document is filled with amazing—and needless—contradictions. It conveys a sense of haste and disinterest. It was apparently assembled by individuals who knew little about the investigations and efforts of their predecessors, and cared even less.

This reflects the well-known conditions that prevailed at Colorado University in March 1968. Although the Project's investigations were not formally ended until June 1968, the staff had been reduced to three by March. Apparently a new staff was thrown together, outside help was enlisted, and the report was completed in the quickest and easiest possible way. Old Air Force releases were collected, various specialists were called upon to throw together papers on their specialities, and it was all tossed into one big stew.

We are told in the acknowledgements that Dr. Condon appealed to the publisher of the *Scientific American* and that he "helped secure the

services of Mr. Daniel S. Gillmor". Gillmor, a long-time science writer, was given the unenviable job of trying to mould this morass into a publishable book.

### Feuds and vindictiveness

A scientific report prepared at a cost of \$600,000 should have little or no room for personal feuds and controversy. It would have been acceptable for one paragraph . . . or even one chapter to be devoted to the much-publicized personal problems encountered by Dr. Condon. But the controversy is touched on again and again in the early parts of the book. Major Donald Keyhoe is repeatedly criticized. In some places the CR reads like a cheap novel. The general tone makes it clear that Dr. Condon is an angry and vindictive man. If he wanted to defend himself and attack his attackers, he should have written his personal memoirs. The tax-payers haven't paid him to express his personal irritations. Considering all the help extended to the Project by Keyhoe and NICAP, Condon's numerous negative comments, all based on carefully selected items lifted out of context (i.e. Captain Ruppelt lent Keyhoe much support, but Condon chose to publish one lone Ruppelt quote which criticized Keyhoe's speculations), add up to a calculated attempt to "get back" at Keyhoe and NICAP and discredit their efforts.

### No new, detailed study

The majority of the "papers" published in the CR are based upon a superficial knowledge of the general UFO situation and would not merit publication in a pulp magazine, let alone a scientific journal.

Since the Condon group had two years in which to collect and study new sightings, and since it was receiving the full cooperation of the public, the press, the civilian UFO organizations and the Air Force, we expected that the final report would at least include detailed charts and graphs analysing the UFO reports of 1966-67. The Project certainly had the personnel, the equipment and the money to prepare such a study. No such study is presented, however. Even more baffling, I could not find any reference to the total number of reports received by the Project. Perhaps the total is included and buried in the fine print somewhere, but I searched carefully for this kind of basic figure. Instead, the report serves up the ancient Air Force tables even though we are told ". . . only about one-eighth of sightings were reported anywhere, and not all of these were reported to the Air Force" (p. 45). You would think that this basic discovery would have led to an inspired effort to determine the full

scope of the phenomenon and that more accurate and responsible tables would have been compiled.

In earlier press statements from Colorado we were promised that hundreds of cases and incidents would be reviewed and analysed in the final report. Instead, a mere 59 provide the foundation for the study. Many of those are rehashes of earlier events from the 1950's.

Overall, the CR fails on two very important counts: it lacks the total scientific objectivity to be expected from such a project, and it failed to summarize and analyse the quantity and quality of the reports it received. Both failures are not only inexcusable but scandalous.

### SPECIFIC STUDIES

#### Polls taken

Buried within all of the deceptive and irrelevant material are several reports which deserve careful study by ufologists. I was particularly interested in these reports because they confirm my own research and findings. The polls taken by the Opinion Research Organization under a contract to Colorado University are an interesting contribution, albeit a dull one to those researchers who do not understand the value of such efforts. The thorough examination of the EM effect as related to automobile malfunctions is of great meaning to us. The CR blandly admits that the car-stalling effect is "perhaps the most puzzling".

#### Old explanations

Although the report deals with a number of cases in which the Air Force apparently refused to cooperate with the Project as fully as might have been expected, the CR openly accepts many of the early AF explanations without attempting to ascertain the full facts. The Maury Island "hoax" is dismissed on the strength of Ruppelt's comments and criticisms. The celebrated Walesville, N.Y., plane crash of 1954 is glossed over by repeating Blue Book's vague explanation.

Appendix V is devoted to a 10-paged reprint of a speech delivered by one R. V. Jones on "The Natural Philosophy of Flying Saucers". While this little essay is amusing, it was hardly worthy of inclusion. It does, however, discuss a startling "obfuscation" incident which took place in England in 1946 (pp. 927-928) and was identical to the things still taking place nationwide in the U.S.

#### Expensive historical naïveté

Chapter 1 of Section V is devoted to an essay on "UFOs In History" by Samuel Rosenberg. I was particularly interested in this item since Pentagon informants told me several months ago

that Mr. Rosenberg was being paid the unheard of sum of \$10,000 to write it. However, in his book *UFOs? Yes!* Dr. David R. Saunders claims that Rosenberg was paid only \$3,200. Mr. Rosenberg's chief claim to fame is an article he published on Frankenstein in *Life* several years ago. His contribution is a tired rehash of items from Trench, Thomas, Wilkins and Fort. He opens with the not-very-original conclusion that everything early man saw in the sky was a UFO. Much of the CR has a tone of embarrassing naïveté, but Mr. Rosenberg is the most naive of all when he tries to analyse the well known "Tulli papyrus" which was unearthed in the Vatican in the late 1930s. He makes an amateurish effort to compare the contents of the papyrus with the biblical description of Ezekiel's wheel. Apparently he never realized that the papyrus was first translated from ancient Egyptian into Italian by Catholic translators working in the Vatican. Then it was translated from Italian into English and the phrasing was, of course, religious-oriented ("flying saucers" weren't a "subject" in the 1930s). The only way to make the kind of comparisons he attempts is to obtain both the original Aramic text of Ezekiel's encounters (the Bible was, as you know, mutilated and misinterpreted by the early translators) and match it to the original ancient Egyptian of the papyrus. He did try to track down the papyrus, but it is lost. So his only remaining criticism is that Professor Tulli and translator Prince de Rachelwitz were "amateur Egyptologists". I lived in Egypt for six months and count a number of first-rate Egyptologists among my friends. Traditionally, the best work has been done by dedicated "amateur" Egyptologists because there is very little room for professional (i.e. salaried) men in this narrow and unprofitable field. Egyptology demands excessive scholarship, a wide range of historical and scientific interests, and, above all, great dedication to the subject. Mr. Rosenberg's analysis of the "Tulli papyrus" is not even remotely valid. He uses it as the "clincher" for his argument that historical documentation is suspect. It costs us \$3,200 (or \$10,000) to find this out.

#### Astronaut sightings; Keel attacked

Chapter 6 of Section III is concerned with sightings made by the American astronauts. I have published two articles on those sightings, using extensive material given to me by officials at NASA in Washington, D.C. CR contributor Franklin E. Roach virtually confirms my own statements and repeats, though in somewhat greater depth, my findings both pro and con. He also carefully points out

that at least three of the astronaut sightings are inexplicable.

In keeping with the general policy of the report to downgrade the literature on the subject Roach attacks the opening paragraphs of one of my articles in which I raised doubts about the suggestion that four luminous objects "standing in a neat row", observed by the Gemini 12 mission (Lovell and Aldrin), were three plastic bags of debris and a bag of ELSS (probably faecal matter) which the astronauts had discarded at random into space a number of orbits earlier. Although I was limited by space, and the impracticability to go into technical details in a popular magazine piece, I was really questioning the explanation on the basis of orbital mechanics. Would four small plastic bags tossed at random into space later align themselves in a "neat row" and would they be reflective enough to glow like stars? The explanation simply doesn't work.

Roach implied that I was deliberately making much ado about nothing, and he thereby obliquely tried to discredit the whole article just as other sections of the report attempt to discredit Keyhoe and others through insinuation.

I suffer a few more lumps in Roy Craig's article on *Direct Physical Evidence* (pp. 89-90). My tongue-in-cheek observation that the UFOs may be using the earth as a garbage dump is given a serious treatment. I went through considerable effort and expense to check out the "falls" of "space grass" in 1967. After my article on the subject was published, I received additional samples from all over the country, many of which were accompanied by intriguing UFO reports. Eventually I did obtain actual samples of Air Force "chaff" in the original packaging, as well as a map showing precisely where such materials were being dumped by AF training missions. Air Force "chaff" is aluminium-coated fibre glass. "Space grass" is almost pure aluminium with a slight trace of magnesium. Both substances are almost identical in appearance. The Condon group received similar samples but they chose to analyse and investigate a sample which had been collected in 1957!

My article on "space grass" went to some lengths to explain my efforts to get the Air Force to explain it to me. But Craig's essay implies that I am a gullible "believer" hell-bent on proving that ordinary substances are from outer space.

APRO's famed magnesium sample is also picked apart in the CR and rejected. Dr. Saunders was involved in the testing of those samples and his conclusions in his book are contrary to those in the CR.

## Conclusion

### End product does not justify cost

A new and useless controversy will undoubtedly rage around the Condon Report for some time to come. The report raises more questions than it answers. First of all, it does not offer sufficient material to justify the great cost. Colorado University should be forced to give a public accounting of its expenses. Eighty per cent of the final report could have been assembled by any other publisher for \$5,000 or even less. The remaining 20 per cent could have been assembled by a small group of three or four competent investigators, over a period of six months on a budget of, perhaps, \$25,000.

We must, therefore, question the basic integrity of the project and of the man who led it. We must question the methods used. We must question the qualifications of the people who assembled the final report. We must question the scientific validity of the report. We must object to this report's use in expressing the personal attitudes, opinions, and peevishness of the men involved. We must question its overall objectivity.

At best, it is a slipshod attempt to slap together a "product" which would meet the requirements of the Air Force contract but nothing more. We are told that the Ford Motor Company conducted experiments in the EM effect at *their own expense*. It is implied that many other companies and organizations contributed *free* research to the project. During the course of the investigations (February 1967/March 1968) only twelve people were employed by the project full-time. Some were hired months after the project began. We are asked to believe that this project cost \$2,000 a day! The Air Force allotted \$13,000 for accounting and book-keeping alone. Let's see that record.

### Attacks by innuendo

Many long-time researchers and experts in the field were not even consulted. Neither Ivan T. Sanderson nor Ray Palmer are mentioned in the report. Other leading UFO researchers such as Dr. James McDonald, Coral Lorenzen, John Fuller, and Major Keyhoe are repeatedly attacked by innuendo. It is doubtful, however, if any of them will have grounds for a law suit. Colorado University formally withdrew all legal support from the Project in June 1968 but in the acknowledgements several lawyers are named "for valuable advice on legal problems related to the study". It seems that someone has carefully checked the text and watered-down statements which might have led to a law suit.